

**The Honorable Steve Chabot, Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia**

**“Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt, Part I”**

**February 15, 2012**

Just over one year ago, Hosni Mubarak resigned as President of Egypt in response to massive and sustained protests by the Egyptian people. Unfortunately, as the last year has illustrated far too well, freedom rarely marches steadily forward in a straight line. Over the past year, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) under the leadership of Field Marshal Tantawi has ruled Egypt with the stated goal of turning power over to a civilian government as soon as possible. Recent developments, however, do not leave me optimistic about Egypt’s future. Over a year later, the SCAF is still in charge, Islamist groups hold a majority in the People’s Assembly—the lower house of the Egyptian Parliament—the Egyptian economy appears to be on the verge of collapse, and the recent raids on civil society NGOs call into question the current government’s commitment to democratic principles.

With nearly 47 percent of the elected seats in the Egyptian parliament going to the Muslim Brotherhood—and nearly a quarter to other Islamist parties—it is clear that Islamists will dominate the Egyptian political landscape over the next year. And it will be a critical year. It is during this time that the Egyptian constitution will be drafted by a 100-person Constitutional Assembly which is to be elected by the new Islamist-dominated parliament. It will then be put before Egyptians as a referendum.

Many question the Islamists’ commitment to democratic principles. Elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy and, as countries like Egypt build its structures of government, it is critical that Egyptians establish key institutions of liberal government: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, equal rights for woman, religious and ethnic minorities, and a free press. I am deeply concerned that the recent violence against the Egyptian Christian community as well as a lawsuit brought by Islamists against Naguib Sawiris, an Egyptian Coptic businessman and liberal politician, for having tweeted a cartoon making fun of Islamists may be indicative of the direction Egypt is heading in.

I am also concerned about the future of the Israeli-Egyptian relationship. The Muslim Brotherhood as well as other Islamist parties have made several troubling and contradictory statements regarding the future of the peace treaty with Israel. I would caution any future government of Egypt to tread very, very carefully. The peace treaty between Israel and Egypt has helped secure peace in the Middle East for over three decades. It represents an ironclad commitment between two sovereign states and should not be subject to political posturing. Any adverse alteration to it, its provisions, or its implementation will be taken as a sign that Egypt is

no longer interested in being a force for peace and stability and would be met with tremendous opposition here in the Congress.

Perhaps the most urgent of the recent developments, however, are the raids on NGOs operating in Egypt. On December 29, 2011, Egyptian government officials raided the offices of numerous civil society NGOs, including the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), and Freedom House (FH) as part of a criminal investigation into foreign funding of NGOs commissioned by Minister of International Cooperation Fayza Abul Naga. Since these initial raids, the Government of Egypt has taken numerous actions which have directly escalated the situation. The Egyptian Government has barred at least six American NGO employees from leaving the country and, on February 6, issued criminal charges against 43 people, including the Egypt country directors of NDI and IRI. 19 Americans have been charged, including Sam LaHood, the son of our former colleague and U.S. Transportation Secretary, Ray LaHood, and Charles Dunne, head of Middle East programs at Freedom House and the husband of Dr. Dunne, one of our witnesses today. Just yesterday, the Government of Egypt slapped another travel ban on an American student in Egypt and a top Muslim Brotherhood official threatened that any alteration to U.S. aid in response to the NGO raids would force a reevaluation of the peace treaty with Israel.

I cannot overstate the gravity of this situation which seriously calls into question the Government of Egypt's commitment to the principles of democratic governance. These NGOs pursued a singular goal: to assist the people of Egypt in advocating for the protection of their own human and civil rights at this critical time of transition. Decisions about assistance to Egypt must ultimately be shaped by the choices and policies made by the Egyptian government. We have an interest in strongly supporting a democratic government that respects the rights of its citizens and rule of law, fosters greater economic opportunity, and observes international obligations. But we would clearly have to reevaluate our support of any government that does not respect the institutions of free government, discriminates against or represses its citizens, or which pursues policies which are destabilizing in the region. A refusal by the Government of Egypt to, in the immediate future, return all seized property, drop the travel ban it has instated, drop all charges against both American and Egyptian NGO employees, and allow these organizations to operate free of constraints will certainly have a most negative effect on the broader U.S.-Egyptian relationship and will necessitate a reconsideration of U.S. assistance to Egypt.

For decades, Egypt has been a critical ally of the United States in the global war on terror and in the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace. Egypt has been, and I hope will remain, a leader in the Arab world and a force for peace in the region. I hope our witnesses here today can help us understand the current trajectory in Egypt and to help guide U.S. policy to ensure that a democratic Egypt rises from the ash heap of authoritarianism.